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ABSTRACT

The merging of Total Quality Management (TQM) and Involvement Theory into a managerial philosophy can assist student affairs professionals with an approach for conducting work that improves student affairs practice. When merged or integrated, accountability can easily be obtained because the base philosophies of qualitative research, TQM, and Involvement Theory are congruent. Their compatibility and natural fit are evident when merged in an approach that has its focus on the individual or specific, not the whole or global. The various levels at which the suggested managerial approach has been implemented illustrate slightly different styles, viewpoints, and techniques for conducting student affairs work, but the emphasis on empowering workers to focus on customers, quality, and excellence are never lost. Qualitative research frees the professional from the time-consuming constraints of performing research that features single variables, manipulation, laboratory studies, randomization, and control groups. Student needs, satisfaction, and outcomes are all measurable. The information and data produced from qualitative research can provide student affairs professionals with valuable documentation and tangible evidence regarding student life. The merging of TQM and Involvement Theory into a managerial philosophy that utilizes qualitative research will allow student affairs professionals to experience accountability, quality, and excellence. (ABL)

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RESPONSIBLE STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTICE: MERGING STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT

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RESPONSIBLE STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTICE: MERGING STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Student affairs professionals are faced with the difficult task of integrating theory and practice into an effective and efficient approach to fulfilling campus responsibilities. The demands for accountability from the public sector and the pressure imposed by an increasingly diverse student population require that creative approaches be implemented in the day to day work of student affairs. Although student development remains the central thesis of the profession, the merging of the theoretical and the practical most effectively represents the student personnel point of view for today's responsible student affairs professional.

The dilemma for the student affairs professional is that the clarity of meticulously developed theory fades to ambiguity in actual practice. This issue assumes urgent proportions as professionals prepare for the 21st Century. Populations of students once taken for granted are increasing in significance to institutions of higher education. Rather than serving the few, the colleges and universities of the future will serve the mass. Simultaneously, reduced budgets, closer scrutiny by the public and by legislators, and other economic and social events signal the end of sanctuary for higher education. State leaders and consumers of higher education are increasingly becoming more outspoken about matters once left to colleges and universities. Fundamental questions are being asked about student participation in college, and graduate preparation for a changing society. There is a call for tangible evidence that college does make a difference (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

In order to be responsible partners in the higher education enterprise, student affairs professionals must assist their institutions in providing tangible evidence. The introspective freedom of fitting square pegged theory into round hold practice is not available in today's climate. To be accountable for student development and other positive student outcomes, student affairs professionals must attend to managerial requirements within the context of the developmental philosophy of their profession.

Figure 1 depicts an overview of a philosophy for the work of student affairs professionals that improves practice by addressing both developmental instincts and managerial requirements. The tenets of and similarities between Student Involvement Theory and Total Quality Management (TQM) represent a sympathetic merging of theory and practice which is capable of being measured using qualitative research methodologies. Key ingredients to the merger are:

I. STUDENT AFFAIRS --- mission.

II. TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT --- a commitment to the managerial philosophy.

III. CUSTOMERS --- internal, external.

IV. INVOLVEMENT THEORY --- focus on the individual.

V. NEEDS ASSESSMENT --- customers' expectations.

VI. VISION --- strategic plan, resource availability.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION --- measure satisfaction and quality.

VIII. CHANGE AND IMPROVEMENT --- meet customers' expectations.

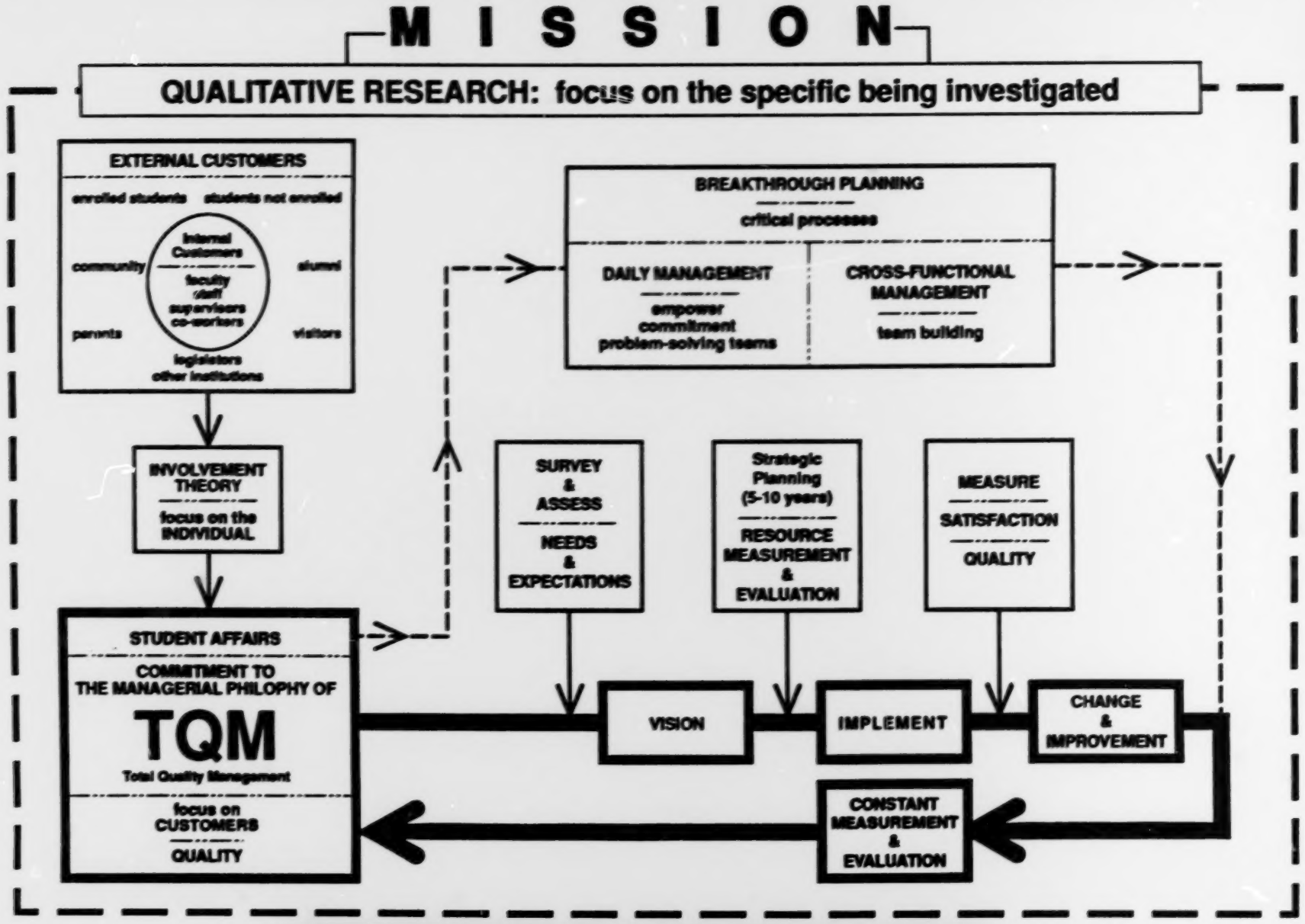

Figure 1. Total quality for improving practice.

by phillip a. whitner, ph.d. and daniel j. abrahamowicz, ph.d. • *The University of Toledo*

IX. CONSTANT MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION --- focus on the specific being evaluated utilizing qualitative research methodologies.

Qualitative Research - The Vehicle

In general, student affairs professionals have been too busy attending to their work -- students -- and have neglected, sometimes purposefully, the measurement of the effectiveness of their efforts. A major reason for the neglect is that student affairs professionals have not wanted to hold themselves out for criticism from other professionals (Rizo, 1991; Salomon, 1991; Tebes & Kraemer, 1991). Critics are quick to point out the weaknesses of the research rather than its value. Weaknesses generally center around the issues that 1) the research was not scientific, 2) it lacked investigator controls, 3) the data were contaminated (via the research design, the researchers' biases and prejudices, and/or the method of collecting the data), and 4) the results or findings of the study pertain only to the group studied and therefore, are not generalizable to other populations.

Keller (cited in Kuh & Andreas, 1991) is critical of higher education scholars because he believes they have been the greatest inhibitors of qualitative research. He says these scholarly inhibitors have subscribed to the notion that colleges and universities can and should be studied scientifically.

However, the debate regarding the incompatibility of the quantitative and the qualitative research methods seems to be diminishing according to Salomon (1991). He provided evidence that there has been a mutual acceptance of opposing methodologies by research experts who have long been dedicated to a single specific ideology. Salomon argued that the two methodologies complement each other and

therefore, are compatible. One method, the quantitative or the scientific, focuses on the manipulation of single or specific variables, while the other, the qualitative or the unscientific, focuses on the whole or the total system. He said both methods are invaluable in their own right and complement and enrich each other. The war of the paradigms should be put to rest because it diverts attention from a fundamental issue that transcends the quantitative-qualitative distinction. Salomon said, "The realization that discrete, often manipulated events, and complex environments require different research approaches has led to the growing acceptance of the qualitative perspective to research as if it were the better way to handle complex and dynamic environments" (p. 11).

The value and application of using qualitative research methods to study higher education ecologies has only recently begun to be strongly encouraged (MacKay & Schuh, 1991; Patton, 1991; Rizo, 1991; Tebes & Kraemer, 1991; Whitt, 1991). Student affairs, according to Caple (1991), "...is not a system with clean boundaries. It is based on the application of human experience and what, if anything, may be done to direct and shape human development. Ill-defined concepts are more the rule than the exception" (p. 387). Caple contends no single source can produce or even facilitate a science of human development. He said, "The developing complexities of the social structure dictates that better methods of study are needed to keep pace with understanding its nature" (p. 387). Even though the qualitative approach to conducting research is advocated, Caple encourages student affairs professionals to learn, understand, and become familiar with both the qualitative and the quantitative approaches to research. Both methodologies have their strengths and weaknesses, and each can produce valuable results.

The growing recognition of the utility of qualitative research in higher education is hailed as positive by Kuh and Andreas (1991). They say, "It is time student affairs professionals entertain the use of qualitative methods in their study of students and campus life" (p. 404).

An implicit message resonated by qualitative research is that the investigation is concerned with the specific -- not the general or global. If the research findings, or parts of the investigation are found to be generalizable to other populations, it is then that serendipitous information has been uncovered. Stated differently, it can be said the qualitative approach to research is primarily interested in the consumer, or the customer -- not other populations. Therefore, the congruent and compatible aspects of qualitative research, Involvement Theory and TQM complement their usage in an approach for performing student affairs work. Such an approach can be used to provide tangible evidence regarding student outcomes, needs, satisfaction, and students' utilization of services and involvement in co-curricular programs.

Operationalizing the Approach

Total Quality Management, Involvement Theory, and qualitative research have been merged (sometimes unknowingly) in an approach for performing student affairs work. The approach has been operationalized in an integrative manner at the individual, group, organizational, and institutional levels. Examples of the approach being implemented at the different levels demonstrate the commitment to the major themes of: 1) quality and excellence; 2) customer needs and satisfaction; 3) empowerment; 4) constant change and improvement; and 5) measurement.

There are generalization that can be made across higher education settings and there are examples of various managerial approaches for conducting business. But, each college or university must find its own unique managerial philosophy and approach (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Kuh, Whitt & Shedd, 1987). A managerial philosophy that merges TQM, Involvement Theory, and qualitative research concepts into an approach for conducting student affairs work will produce valuable information that can be beneficial to students, student affairs administrators, service providers, and program developers. Even though there are inherent difficulties with any managerial approach for gathering and interpreting information and data, the methods utilized can be rewarding because they can provide an immediate, low-cost guide to identifying experiences and trends that may impact the quality and excellence of the college environment. Implicit in the examples that follow, but not discussed, are the merged managerial philosophies of TQM and Involvement Theory.

Individual

A qualitative approach to research can be used to explore and explain experiences of college student life. The qualitative methods and techniques provide broad, in-depth information and a personal perspective and reaction regarding specific life experiences.

An open-minded qualitative technique, the personal essay (Giddan & Whitner, 1992), was used to obtain information about unanticipated experiences, or surprises, that influenced a college student's persistence. The "insider" perspective (Fetterman, 1988) of the personal essay was simple to administer, required minimal

statistical analysis, and produced a plethora of rich, in-depth information. In this case, students were given a pencil and a single sheet of paper with the title PERSONAL ESSAY and a short instructional paragraph typed at the top. In the instructional paragraph students were asked to describe on the front and back of the paper those events or experiences that occurred during college which they did not expect. Students were also asked to provide details regarding their reactions to the experience or surprise, what they did, how they felt, and any subsequent changes they made.

A qualitative approach to research such as this can assist student affairs professionals to understand a host of substantive -- personal, academic, career, social, multicultural -- concerns and issues related to student development. Contemporary trends have shown qualitative research techniques to be more descriptive and feeling-oriented than quantitative methods -- a better methodology for studying issues such as gender, ethnicity, and life-style. College services and programs can benefit from the use of qualitative research and evaluation because the findings and results can guide the development and planning of workshops, programs, and activities that enhance the process of student development.

Groups

Danchise (1985) reported that the staff at a university counseling center engaged small groups of students in academic skill building strategies, techniques, and exercises. Verbal feedback from the participants suggested that the small group

seminars were being well received and having a positive impact on students academic performances, including grade point average (GPA). No single indicator reflects academic progress better than GPA. Because GPA is not immutable, and can be improved through various education and academic skill building programs, a decision was made by staff members to extend the basic small group format to a specific university population as a pilot program.

The principles of TQM and Involvement Theory guided the measurement of the targeted population's progress through the use of qualitative research methodologies. During the first two years, verbal feedback from participants and the group leaders' observations and suggestions were compiled. The compiled data and information provided the impetus for program change and innovation. After two years of operation, additional qualitative research methods were used to assess and evaluate the program on two separate occasions. The first evaluation occurred at the midpoint of the program during the Fall Quarter. Participants were asked to provide handwritten feedback regarding the program. The feedback was compiled and categorized. The second evaluation came at the end of the program when participants were asked to complete an investigator constructed questionnaire. A summary of the data and information generated about the program from the qualitative research methods was reported by Whitner and Altman (1986). At a later date, Sanz and Whitner (1987) used qualitative strategies to measure the program's impact on the target population's academic performance.

The qualitative approach was criticized by a few professionals because they considered the research to be a) non-scientific, b) lacking stringent controls, and c) investigator biased. Nevertheless, the variables and criteria that need to be considered and used when developing an academic support program were identified and reported (Whitner & Sanz, 1988). Eventually, a model for measuring the academic achievements among and between student populations at different institutions of higher education was developed (Whitner, 1990).

Organizational

A widely recognized phenomenon in public health, public education, and social psychology is that seldom is there an immediate active vocal constituency for prevention activities (Glaser, Abelson, & Garrison, 1983; Schulberg & Baker, 1979; Suls & Willis, 1991). Colleges and universities are not immune to this phenomenon. Unfortunately, program "success" or "failure" is typically determined by the size of the audience or the number of participants. Seldom is the program content or the value of its intended impact considered.

The question, "What impact would student group or organizational sponsorship have on prevention and co-curricular program attendance?" was asked. To address the question, a pilot research project based on six programs was conducted during the 1990-91 academic year (Whitner, Abrahamowicz & Giddan, in press). These six prevention-oriented programs were varied somewhat systematically

in terns of topic or theme, locale and setting, and presenter's gender and training. In brief, the programs were randomly divided into two sets of three each. One set was designated to have student group or organization involvement. The other set, no organizational involvement or sponsorship. The set of programs with no involvement were publicized the same as past programs that had no sponsoring agent. The sponsored programs' publicity was the responsibility of the involved student groups or organizations, which were a residence hall group, a sorority, and an academic speaker activity (earn extra-class credit).

The absence or presence of group or organizational involvement and sponsorship was the primary difference between these two set of programs. Total program attendance figures were: no-involvement 19; involvement 187. From this pilot project, there is suggestive evidence that student group and organizational involvement was a key variable in measuring the success of prevention or co-curricular educational programs as indexed by program attendance. Student organizations, clubs, and groups are a valuable resource that all university professionals can utilize through involvement. Involving student organizations to sponsor or endorse prevention or co-curricular programs and activities guarantees a sizeable program audience. Attracting sizeable program audiences guarantees that institutional resources and expertise are maximized and that information which needs to be disseminated is achieved at a more rapid rate.

Institutional

The concepts of the scanning strategy described by Morrison, Renfro, and Boucher (1984) were reviewed, evaluated, and modified in 1991 by a small group of administrators (Giddan, Whitner, & Abrahamowicz, in press). The modified strategy was then applied to existing large amounts of institutional empirical data. The application of the modified strategy was qualitative because it required a logical and analytic process to be imposed on existing sets of tallies, percentages, and other types of information. In addition, the administrators had no control over the gathering of the information or data, the statistic with which it was described, the sampling, or the research designs. Nevertheless, the qualitative method was used to compartmentalize the information and data into smaller groups or categories which were more manageable, useful, relevant, and easier to interpret. The University of California at Los Angeles -- Cooperative Institutional Research Program (UCLA-CIRP) study is an example of large amounts of institutional information that is provided to a college or university about its own student population (Astin, Green, & Korn, 1987). Institutional characteristics, tendencies, and trends that may be obtained from such data through qualitative methods can be beneficial to students, service providers, middle management staff, executive staff, and university planners and goals setters.

For example, when data from a survey suggest that students feel alone, alienated, and separated from each other, then student affairs professionals can take

appropriate institutional measures to address the problem. Or, the students may be referred to an appropriate university service or office. A study of membership in student organizations was conducted by Abrahamowicz (1988). He found that students who were involved in student organizations had a more positive outlook and reported a greater degree of satisfaction with their college experience than students who were not involved in student organizations. Abrahamowicz also serendipitously found that the student organizations that were the more visible and the most involved with the campus ecology were perceived as distinctively superior and the most preferred.

Conclusion

The merging of TQM and Involvement Theory into a managerial philosophy can assist student affairs professionals with an approach for conducting work that improves student affairs practice. When merged or integrated, accountability can easily be obtained because the base philosophies of qualitative research, TQM, and Involvement Theory are congruent. Their compatibility and natural fit are evident when merged in an approach that has its focus on the individual or specific, not the whole or global.

The various levels at which the suggested managerial approach has been implemented illustrate slightly different styles, viewpoints, and techniques for conducting student affairs works, but the emphasis on empowering workers to focus

on customers, quality, and excellence are never lost. Qualitative research frees the professional from the time-consuming constraints of performing research that features single variables, manipulation, laboratory studies, randomization, and control groups. Instead, surveys, single group studies, and case studies are used because the time-saving methods allow student affairs professionals to evaluate the specific and then move on to attend to other student related work and activities. Also, qualitative methods are simple and easy to teach and administer, and the information and data obtained is relevant, suggestive, and useful.

Student needs, satisfaction, and outcomes are all measurable. The information and data produced from qualitative research can provide student affairs professionals with valuable documentation and tangible evidence regarding student life. The merging of TQM and Involvement Theory into a managerial philosophy that utilizes qualitative research will allow student affairs professionals to experience accountability, quality, and excellence.

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